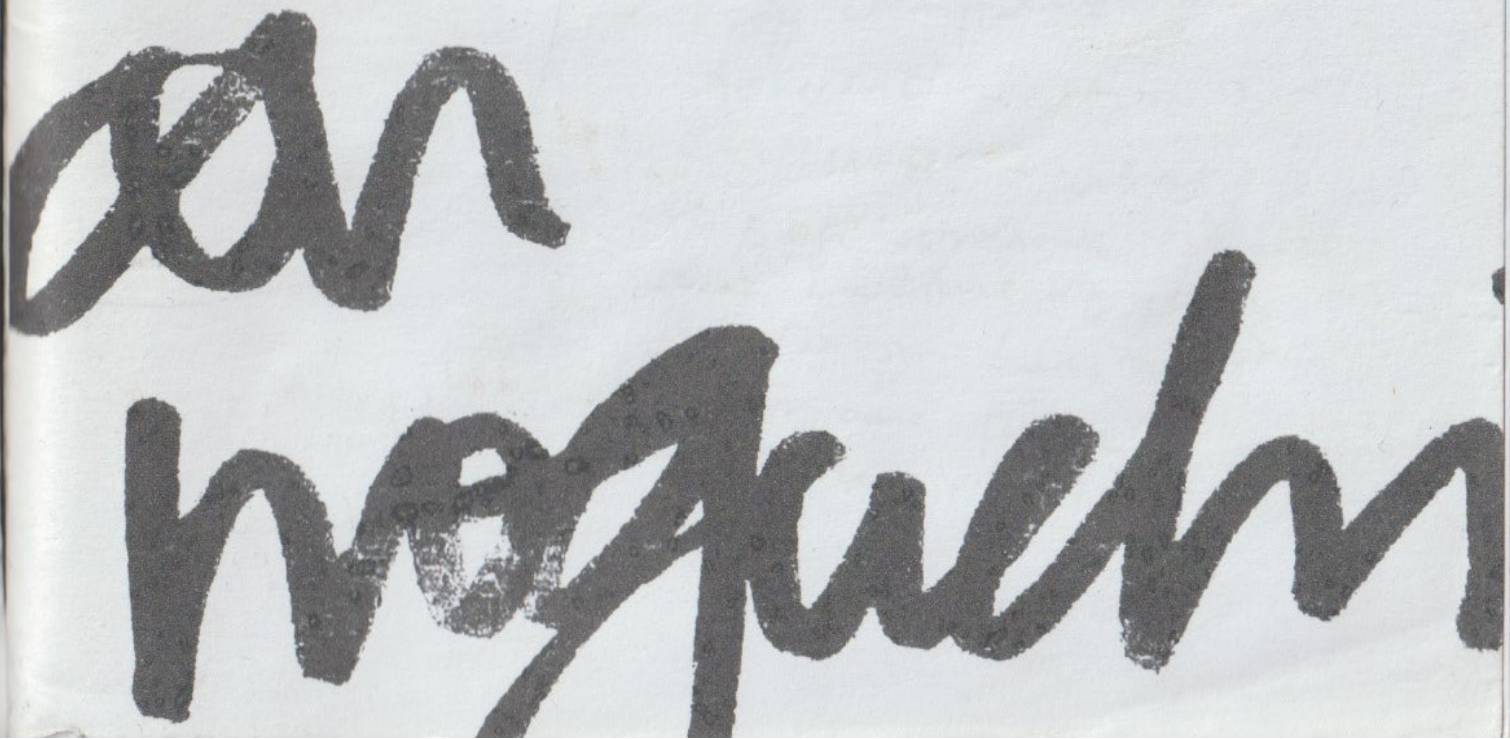
A COLLECTION OF REFERENCE MATERIAL

COMPILED TO ACCOMPANY THE ASSESSMENT OF NAOMI FOTENOS SCULPTURE YEAR 1



to speak
to think
to draw
to write
to make

TO SPEAK MEANS TO BE IN A POSITION TO USE A CERTAIN SYNTAX... TO GRASP THE MORPHOLOGY OF THIS OR THAT LANGUAGE... BUT... ABOVE ALL TO ASSUME A CULTURE.

Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 1952.

immediately complex:
ASSUME - how?
CULTURE - what?
do you assume
the culture of your
birth or heritage?
how are these
terms defined?

american interpretation of breaking Japan's isolation in 1854.

1855. Wilhelm Heine, lithograph, First landing of Americans in Japan Under Commodore M.C. Perry at Gore-Hama, July 14th 1853. Brown University digital repository.

WHAT AN INDIVIDUAL DEEMS AS ESSENTIAL TO HIS OR HER CULTURE HAS USUALLY MULTIPLE, AND OFTEN QUITE IRREGULAR, ROOTS.

A 'STABLE' CULTURAL IDENTITY IS REALLY AN AGGLOMERATE OF SIGNS, WHICH, AS WITH ANY LINGUISTIC SYSTEM, ARE IN THE CONSTANT PROCESS OF MODIFICATION AND CHANGE.

Geczy, A. (2019). Transorientalism in Art, Fashion, and Film: Inventions of Identity.

change occurs constantly but can also be triggered by particularly exceptional events - by exchange.

→ i.e. Meiji restoration in Japan following american contact.

pre-Meiji KOSODE

1750-1800. Unlined Summer Kosode with Landscape and Poem. Embroidered and resist-dyed silk gauze. New York: the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

unisex garment worn across class, even as workwear

post-Meiji KIMONO

1876. Unlined Summer Kimono with Carp, Water Lilies, and Morning Glories, Meiji Period. Resist-dyed, painted, and embroidered silk gauze with plain-weave patterning. New York: the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

ceremonial, feminized garment
longer sleeves and brighter colors and patterns

rural men and women. In pre-mod ern Japan, the gendered differences in clothing were far less pronounced, while modern Japan encouraged women to wear kimono and men to wear suits. It also stipulated Western clothing, *yofuku*, and attire, *wafuku*, for weddings, funerals, and the like. (When the Duke of Edinburgh visited in 1869 , the Imperial Court received him wearing formal Western dress. In the next year naval cadets were made to wear uniforms inspired by the British, while the army were inspired by the French. In 1971, policemen an d mailmen were Westernized in their dress, and in 1872 so were rail workers.)[7]

This change also affected the und erstanding of the kimono in Japan from something of a universal garment to a decorative one rese rved for ceremonial occasions. In the Meiji and Taisho eras these sartorial designations became quite intrica te and stratified, especially when applied to geishas, with variations between formal party wear to mo re everyday wear. The ability to cope and comply with these variations was an index of one's status in bei ing able to afford them and also to have the discipline to comply with them, which included seasonal mo difications as well.[8] Complying and discerning carried its own reciprocal prestige, as Liza Dalby affirms: "A practiced eye could distinguish geisha from amateur even if each wore the same outfit. The sa me holds today."[9] The love of such intricate codes suggested a return to a ceremonial past, albeit that m any of these codes were very much of post-Meiji making. One source of such zeal was in the prosperity lea ding up to the First World War, which fostered invention and revival, and the two intertwined.

Thus, in contemporary Japan, the kimono is not only ceremonial dress, but also for those who have learned its protocols. Kimono dressing is a matter of esoteric knowledge, passed down by specialists teaching in specialized kimono schools. In the words of Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni, "With modern kimono, like other inventions of tradition in modern Japan, what is Western plays a significant role. It is conceived in large collective terms that make it abso lutely and systematically different from the Japanese. Both the Western and the Japanese are referred to as cultural and discursive constructs rather than as objective realities."[10] This dialectical play is crucial to th e way in which Japan created its Japaneseness that appeared to leave tradition intact without forgoing the benefits of Western progress. It was during the modernization period that the difference between what was Western (*yo*) and what was Japanese (*wa*) was articulated and justified.

Geczy, A. (2019). Transori-entalism in Art, Fashion, and Film: Inventions of Identity.

Perry returned on February 13, 1854, after only half a year rather than the full year pron ised, and with ten ships and 1,600 men. American leadership designed the show of force to "command fear" an d "astound the Orientals."[26]:31 After initial resistance, Perry was permitted to land at Kanagawa, near the site of present-day Yokohama on March 8, and the Convention of Kanagawa was signed on March 31. Per ry signed as American plenipotentiary, and Hayashi Akira, also known by his title of *Daigaku-no-kami*, signed fo r the Japanese side. The celebratory events for the signing ceremony included a Kabuki play from the Japanese side and, from the American side, U.S. military band music and blackface minstrelsy.[26]:32–33

Wikipedia,
"Matthew C. Perry."

Perry's white soldiers in black face

Japanese documentation of the minstrelsy performance

was reportedly very comic and memorable

1854. Hibata Osuke, "The Mission of Commodore Perry to Japan," Handscroll painting, the British Museum.

notable that the subjugation of Black people in the US was present at the first moment of exchange between the US + Japan - and considered an essential part (an attraction!) of american culture.

1854. Woodcut engraving of Matthew Perry published in a broadside (Japanese newsletter).

Matthew Perry, American, first to make formal contact with Japan, ending its 200+ year isolation under the Tokugawa Shogunate.

early depiction of the western military dress that would go on to be mandated in Japan associated with military strength, as the american fleet was v. intimidating

Adoption of western dress = Defensive act because of western imperial success in region

Democratic structures + industry + tech

additionally the influence of Japanese design + architecture is Modernism + Abstract Expressionism in 20th c.

consider the massive influence of Japanese woodblock prints on western Impressionism?

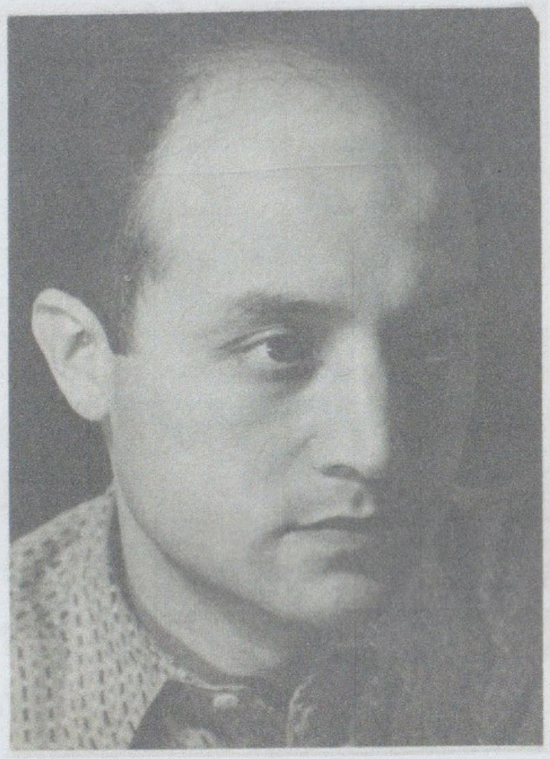
WESTERN ORIENTALIZING, COUNTER ORIENTALISMS, SELF-ORIENTALIZING, ORIENTALISM DIRECTED AT OTHER ASIAN COUNTRIES: THE INTERWEAVINGS OF SUCH CONSTITUTIVE CONTRADICTIONS PRODUCE 'JAPAN.'

Dorrine Kondo, "About Face: Performing Race in Fashion and Theater," 1997.

kosode becoming Kimono

consider the emphasis on craft arts in tourism

Japan's imperial projects in the region up to WWII.



c. 1942. Man Ray, Portrait of Isamu Noguchi, silver gelatin print. Art Institute of Chicago.

mother's surname

SAM GILMOUR
ISAMU NOGUCHI

b. 1904 - 1988

father's (absent) surname

WHILE CLAIMING, OWNING, AND REPRESENTING INDIGENOUS IDENTITY HAS ALWAYS BEEN A FRAUGHT TOPIC, IT IS ESPECIALLY HARD TO NAVIGATE IN THE INSTANCES WHERE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IDENTIFY WITH THEIR HERITAGE YEARS AFTER THEIR BIRTH...

→ could this also apply accurately to diasporic / or mixed artists? Can it become disingenuous?

MANY INDIGENOUS ARTISTS EMBARK ON PATHS OF RECLAMATION AND RETURN. THIS RETURN IS TO THE PHYSICAL PLACES, BUT IT IS ALSO IMAGINED, SPIRITUAL, AND SYMBOLIC. THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IS CENTRAL TO THIS PROCESS, AS IDENTIFICATION COMES FROM NAMING, AS NAMES DESIGNATE AND SITUATE THE SUBJECT: THE NAME IS THE "WHAT" BOUND TO THE "WHO."

Geczy, A. (2019). Transorientalism in Art, Fashion, and Film: Inventions of Identity. London: Bloomsbury

→ Noguchi changed his name after dropping out of school to pursue sculpture — the change is tied to identity / function as an artist.

1879. Japanese soldiers in western military dress in front of Kankaimon gate at Shuri Castle, Okinawa. Wikimedia Commons.

appearance of western military dress.

Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 1993, a follow up to his seminal book *Orientalism*, 1978.

Japan was an imperializing power — also occupied by the US post war

FOR THE FIRST TIME, THE HISTORY OF IMPERIALISM AND ITS CULTURE CAN NOW BE STUDIED AS NEITHER MONOLITHIC NOR REDUCTIVELY COMPARTMENTALISED, SEPARATE, DISTINCT.

1894. Nobukazy Yosai, "The Battle of Pyongyang." Depiction of Japanese cavalry attacking the Chinese army in the first Sino-Japanese War (1994-1895) over Korea as a tributary state.

a Aemon Geczy's proposal

TRANSORIENTALISM HIGHLIGHTS...THE METHODS BY WHICH FOREIGNNESS IS RENOUNCED OR THE OPPOSITE; REINVIGORATED, REHEARSED, AND RESUSCITATED.

Geczy, A. (2019). Transorientalism in Art, Fashion, and Film: Inventions of Identity.

Do d ever re-emphasize my foreigness? why?

Do artists — did Noguchi?

Can he be considered a transorientalist artist?

Noguchi's cultural identity was characterized by a similar flux. Born in Los Angeles, he was taken at age two by his American mother to Japan, the country of his father. At age fourteen he was sent back to the United States for his education; here he was known as Sam Gilmour until the early 1920s when he decided to become an artist and reverted to his Japanese name, Isamu Noguchi. Other reformulations of self-identity took place later in his career; in the 1930s he designed a monument to the plow for the exact center of the United States, as though positing himself at the heart of America. But during World War II he voluntarily entered an internment camp in Arizona as a conscientious act of solidarity with the Japanese Americans who were forcibly relocated to such camps on account of their race. In the early 1950s we find him attempting to settle down with a Japanese wife in a rustic Japanese house of his own design in the countryside in Kamakura, while in the late 1950s he was back in New York City working with metal as an expression of his modern American urban environment.

Bert Winther, "Review of *Isamu Noguchi* by Bruce Altshuler," 1995.

Bert Winther, "The Rejection of Isamu Noguchi's Hiroshima Cenotaph: A Japanese American Artist in Occupied Japan," 1994.

The career of the Japanese American sculptor and designer Isamu Noguchi (1904–1988) weaves through six decades of the turbulent politics on the border of the East/West discourse. Edward Said, one of the most influential critics of this discourse, shatters the most basic premise of the rhetorical context of much of Noguchi's work: "Throughout the exchange between Europeans and their 'others' that began systematically half a millennium ago, the one idea that has scarcely varied is that there is an 'us' and a 'them,' each quite settled, clear, unassailably self-evident."[1] For if we call this "*prima facie* us/them identity" into question and scrutinize its politics, then the view of Noguchi as a modernist synthesizer of East/West miscegenation becomes untenable, and he emerges as an artist whose innovative progress was alternately stimulated and inhibited by the changing parameters of territorialization and deterritorialization.[2] As cultural attributes of the East/West binary opposition come to seem more like shibboleths and clichés than inalienable attributes of race, Noguchi emerges as a nimble correspondent to the ebb and flow of Japanese American (naturalized as East/West) cultural and political relations.

Isamu's father:

1903, Portrait of Yone Noguchi by Charles W. Hearn.

Yone's lover also

Yone Noguchi, the first Japanese-born writer to publish poetry in English, was born in 1875 in Tsushima. While studying at Keio Gijuku, Noguchi decided to travel to the United States. After arriving in San Francisco in 1893, Noguchi worked as a journalist and as a domestic servant before deciding to pursue poetry. A few years later, Noguchi published his first poems in a small San Francisco magazine called *The Lark*. He went on to publish many articles and several books of poetry and prose. He returned to Japan in 1905 and continued to publish extensively in English, including *Selected Poems of Yone Noguchi* (The Four Seas Company, 1921), establishing himself as a cross-cultural and transnational writer. The father of Isamu Noguchi, one of the twentieth century's renowned sculptors, Noguchi died in Toyooka-mura on July 13, 1947.

Poets.org, "Yone Noguchi 1875-1947."

The war years [edit]

Noguchi's politics tended to follow prevailing Japanese tendencies. In the 1920s, following the leftist turn of Taishō democracy, he published in leftist magazines like *Kaizō*, but by the 1930s, he had followed the country's turn to the right. Partly as a result of his friendship with leading Indian intellectuals like Rabindranath Tagore and Sarojini Naidu, Noguchi was sent to India in 1935–36 to help gain support for Japanese objectives in East Asia, but he had limited success. Noguchi and Tagore had a bitter exchange of letters in 1938 before their friendship ended over political and philosophical differences.[20] During the Second World War, Noguchi supported the Japanese cause, advocating a no-holds-barred assault on the Western countries he had once admired.

Postwar period [edit]

nationalism + fascism in WW II

In April 1945, his house in Nakano, Tokyo was destroyed in the American Bombing of Tokyo. After the war, he succeeded in reconciling with his estranged son Isamu before dying of stomach cancer on July 13, 1947.

Wikipedia, "Yone Noguchi."

WHERE IS THE POET

The inky-garmented, truth-dead Cloud—woven by dumb ghost alone in the darkness of phantasmal mountain-mouth—kidnapped the maiden Moon, silence-faced, love-mannered, mirroring her golden breast in silvery rivulets :

The Wind, her lover, grey-haired in one moment, crazes around the Universe, hunting her dewy love-letters, strewn secretly upon the oat-carpets of the open field.

O, drama ! never performed, never gossiped, never rhymed ! Behold—to the blind beast, ever tearless, iron-hearted, the Heaven has no mouth to interpret these tidings !

Ah, where is the man who lives out of himself ?—the poet inspired often to chronicle these things ?

Yone Noguchi, "Where is the Poet," from *Selected poems of Yone Noguchi*, 1921.

Separation from location/place
↓
Static

asks a question of belonging

What foolishness! The united Japanese millions will not accept such pious palaver.
This is all-out, all-out:
We'll show you how decisively we slaughter you, friendship and all![45]

Donald Keene, "Japanese Writers and the Greater East Asia War," in Appreciations of Japanese Culture (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1981), 317-18.

Yone's support of Japan in WW II severed him from his vast network of American + European friends, romantic relationships and professional connections

Always much more popular / successful as a poet in the west — not very much in Japan

FOR IDENTIFICATION, IDENTITY IS NEVER AN A PRIORI, NOR A FINISHED PRODUCT; IT IS ONLY EVER THE PROBLEMATIC PROCESS OF ACCESS TO AN IMAGE OF TOTALITY.

Identification is (futile?) search for totality (belonging? wholeness?)

Homi Bhabha, *The location of culture*, 1994. London: Routledge.

Bhabha writes also of cultural mimesis in colonial context. Could Noguchi's work be considered in some ways Japanese mimicry? How has he been mimicked?

Isamu Noguchi, "The Queen." 1931/c.1943. Earthenware sculpture. Whitney Museum of American Art.

Noguchi mimics? re-interprets, translates, reinvigorates Haniwa & other primitive Japanese ceramic art during his trips to Japan as an adult artist.

Haniwa known as *Dancing man*. 7th century. Earthenware, h. 63.9 cm (25 1/8in.) Excavated at Nohara, Konanmachi, Saitama. Tokyo National Museum.

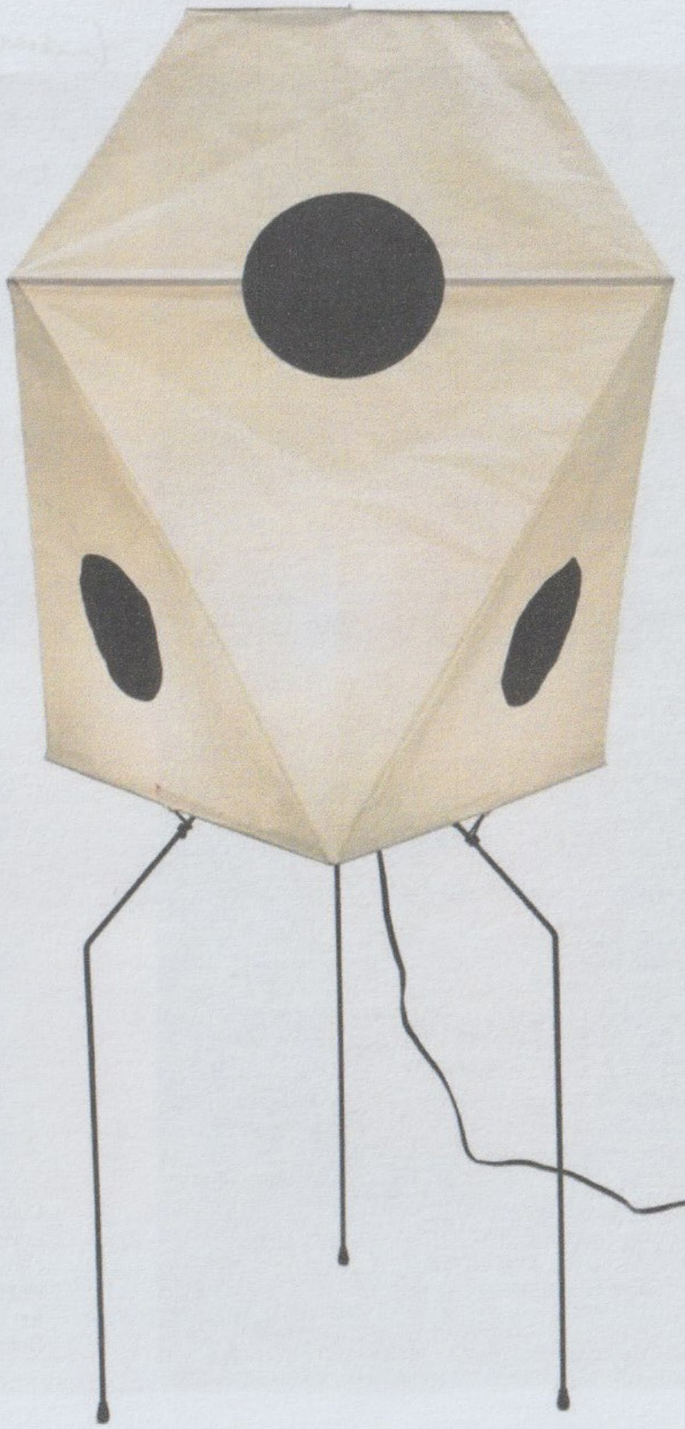
Psychologically, Noguchi's turn to haniwa allowed him to create a symbolic authority that was of greater antiquity and at the same time of more advanced contemporaneity than the Japanese culture championed by his father. While Yone yearned for an "old Japan" that he imagined being "a hundred times more artistic than present Japan,"[42] he shied away from a Japan that was so old as to seem primitive. The Japanese culture that Yone admired most was that of the pre-Meiji period (before 1868), and much of his reputation in Europe and the United States was associated with his writings on the ukiyo-e woodblock prints that had so enamored artists from John La Farge (1835–1910) to Frank Lloyd Wright (1869–1959). Thus, the contemplation of prehistoric Japanese haniwa and the primal earth in Kyoto enabled Isamu to conjure an ancestress in *The Queen* that was of much greater antiquity than the artistic forebears embraced by his father.

Bert Winther-Tamaki, "The Ceramic Art of Isamu Noguchi: A Close Embrace of the Earth," in *Isamu Noguchi and Modern Japanese Ceramics*, 2003. University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London.

Haniwa are pre-modern burial objects endowed w/ spiritual character

Specific uses are unknown - i.e. why the holes

Cylindrical Haniwa, unknown artist, 6th century. Saitama Prefectural Museum of the Sakitama Ancient Burial Mounds.



Connection also to Japanese flag — even Yayoi Kusama?

Isamu Noguchi,
Akari UF3-Q Floor
Lamp.

IT IS THAT THIRD SPACE, THOUGH UNREPRESENTABLE IN ITSELF, WHICH CONSTITUTES THE DISCURSIVE CONDITIONS OF ENUNCIATION THAT ENSURE THAT THE MEANING AND SYMBOLS OF CULTURE HAVE NO PRIMORDIAL UNITY OR FIXITY; THAT EVEN THE SAME SIGNS CAN BE APPROPRIATED, TRANSLATED, REHISTORICIZED AND READ ANEW. !

Homi Bhabha, *The location of culture*, 1994. London: Routledge.

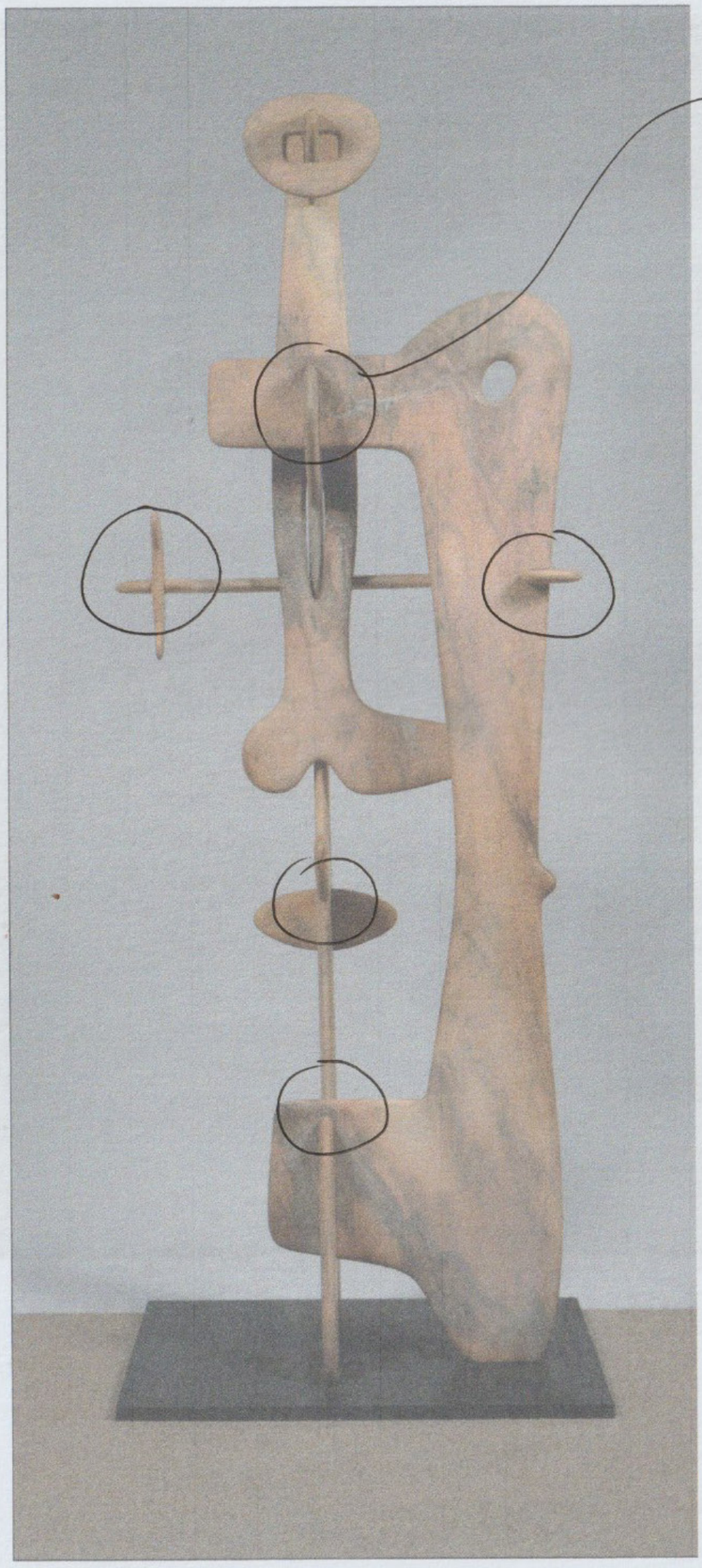
transorientalism =
third space =
hybridism =
exchange, etc. etc.

Isamu Noguchi, "Meanings in Modern Sculpture," Art News 48 March 1949.

WE [SCULPTORS] ARE NOW MORE CONCERNED WITH THE RELATIONSHIP OF THINGS THAN WITH THINGS THEMSELVES. OUR REALITY IS THE SPACE BETWEEN....

↳ acknowledgment of hybridism (third space?)

1946. Noguchi with sculpture (*Figure*, 1946), published in *Life* magazine. Photograph by Julie Wolf.



Isamu Noguchi,
Kouros, 1945.
Marble
sculpture,
9ft x 9ft.

A five-month apprenticeship in 1927 with the renowned Romanian sculptor Constantin Brancusi led Noguchi to his own abstract sculptural language. *Kouros* betrays Noguchi's preoccupation in the mid-1940s with organic patterns and shapes rendered on a monumental scale. A great feat of imagination and engineering, it comprises eight interlocking pieces of pink Georgian marble, secured by a perfect balance in weight and two strategically placed pins. This precariousness evokes Noguchi's uncertainty about the state of the world after World War II, which he characterized as "the encroaching void." The title refers to a type of ancient Greek sculpture showing lone standing male figures, often striding forward into space.

Kouros description,
Metmuseum.org

Rejected proposal for Hiroshima memorial, 1952.

Form references primitive Japanese ceramics again.

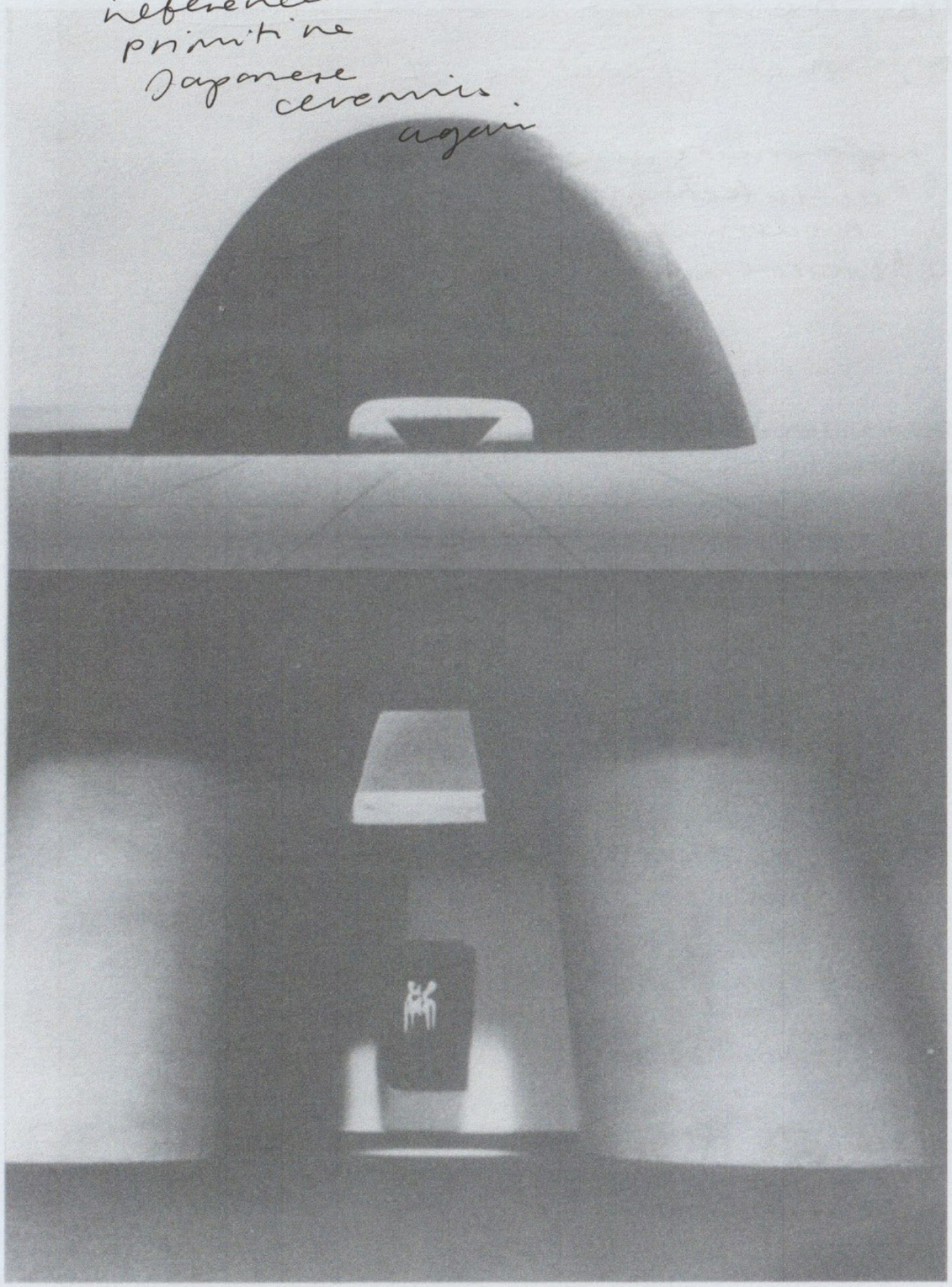


FIG. 1 Isamu Noguchi, model for *Memorial to the Dead of Hiroshima*, 1952, plaster. Photograph courtesy Isamu Noguchi Foundation, Long Island City, N.Y.

Bert Winther, "The Rejection of Isamu Noguchi's Hiroshima Cenotaph: A Japanese American Artist in Occupied Japan," 1994.

very good + interesting essay

The painful politics of identity preceded judgments of aesthetic merit. Tange Kenzō, the architect of the Hiroshima Peace Park who initially selected Noguchi to design the cenotaph, later claimed that the design was turned down because the monument was intended as a national symbol of the people of Japan, and it was thought inappropriate for people to pray at a cenotaph designed by a citizen of the country that dropped the bomb.[13] Noguchi's design had the personal support of the mayor of Hiroshima but was strongly rejected by the Committee for the Construction of the Peace Memorial City, without the approval of which construction was out of the question. According to Tange, a consensus emerged that the cenotaph should be designed by Japanese hands, and the opposition to Noguchi's proposal in the construction committee as well as the Hiroshima City Council was a reflection of this public opinion.[14] An essay published pseudonymously in an influential daily newspaper claimed that "in Isamu Noguchi's blood there is mixed half which is from overseas. . . . Coming to occupied Japan where *Nisei* [second generation Japanese Americans] have clout, he spread the idea in the press that he, of all people, was the most suitable person to make the monument for the slogan 'No More Hiroshima'—thus showing the mixed character of his temperament."[15]

Rejection by Japan - denial of Japaneseness — importance of American citizenship + alignment with american imperialism + power

In 1954 the architect Shirai Sei'ichi took it upon himself to design an imaginary atomic memorial without any particular site in mind or plan for actual construction. His design, which was never to be realized, bears the traces of Noguchi's precedent in its pure geometry and its monumental vertical cylinder pushing through horizontal levels (*fig. 5*). Shirai's design is also analogous to that of Noguchi in its relationship to Japanese tradition; according to an interpretation of 1955 by the architectural critic Kawazoe Noboru, the atomic memorial harbors significant allusions to the seventh-century temple of Hōryū-ji in Nara. Shirai's identity posed no non-Japanese affiliation to inhibit a nativist polemic; Kawazoe dwelled on the significance of the Hiroshima holocaust to the Japanese people. "Western civilization" is the weighted term in his view of the historical causes of the disaster. Western civilization produced the technology of nuclear war, Kawazoe maintained, just as it fomented the imperialism that colonized Asia and forced Japan to adopt a similar imperialist stance to maintain its independence, which led in turn to the Japanese atrocities in Asia:

However, in the midst of violent resistance from the peoples of Asia and upon receiving the highest product of nuclear civilization, the nuclear bomb, Japan was knocked out of the line of Western powers and it was only then that Japanese people were pressed back to a self-realization of their real Asian identity.[18]

Kawazoe noted that this was a particularly bitter irony if, as some suggested, the American bombing of Japan was determined more by racism than by other factors. Thus the conclusion of the war is occasion for a "self-critique of the civilization which Japanese have received." In this destiny the Japanese are unique: "Only the Japanese have directly felt the cruelty possessed by the nuclear bomb and thus we have the strongest knowledge of the dangers of civilization."[19] It was this will to Japanese cultural exceptionalism, woven into the epic of Japan's defeat, that was threatened by the notion of a cenotaph designed by the bicultural Noguchi.

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Paradox of Japanese exceptionalism:

ENESS, HOWEVER, IS FAR MORE
ATION, RACISM, XENOPHOBIA
H RESTS ON
QUENESS, WHICH OFTEN

S DISTINCTIVENESS MAY ALSO
LEM, REVERTING TO MASSIVE
HE SEVENTH CENTURY,
E APPROPRIATIONS FROM THE
OXES PERSIST.

Ihab Hassan, *Between the Eagle and the Sun*, 1996.

Connection
between
Meiji restoration
and post war sentiment/
culture.

Noguchi's combination of impressive credentials as a New York modernist and experiences of alienation from European American culture conspired to make him an unusually significant visitor to the Japanese art community in 1950. At a time when Japanese artists thirsted for access to European and American modern culture and groped for ways to relate Japanese cultural identity to modernism, Noguchi was lionized as a successful American artist who could demonstrate a strong sense of empathy for the plight of contemporary Japanese artists. The warmth of this reception encouraged Noguchi to rekindle his ties to Japan with a vengeance, and from 1950 to 1953 he settled in Japan and worked feverishly on numerous ambitious projects. His position in Japanese culture evolved quickly from that of an eminent visitor to that of a leader at the forefront of Japanese cultural reconstruction; in 1952 he said, "I do not just want to make sculpture . . . I want to build a nation."[4]

Bert Winther, "The Rejection of Isamu Noguchi's Hiroshima Cenotaph: A Japanese American Artist in Occupied Japan," 1994.

How did transorientalism affect Japan's cultural reconstruction after the war and under American occupation

Quoted by Hayashi Fusao, "Isamu Noguchi no Geijutsu o Mite" (Looking at Isamu Noguchi's Art), Tokyo Shimbun, November 6, 1952, 8. Translated by Bert Winther.

I DO NOT JUST WANT TO MAKE SCULPTURE... I WANT TO BUILD A NATION.

Domingo, H. (2012) The Beauty of Cormorant Night Fishing [Photograph]. JapanTravel.com

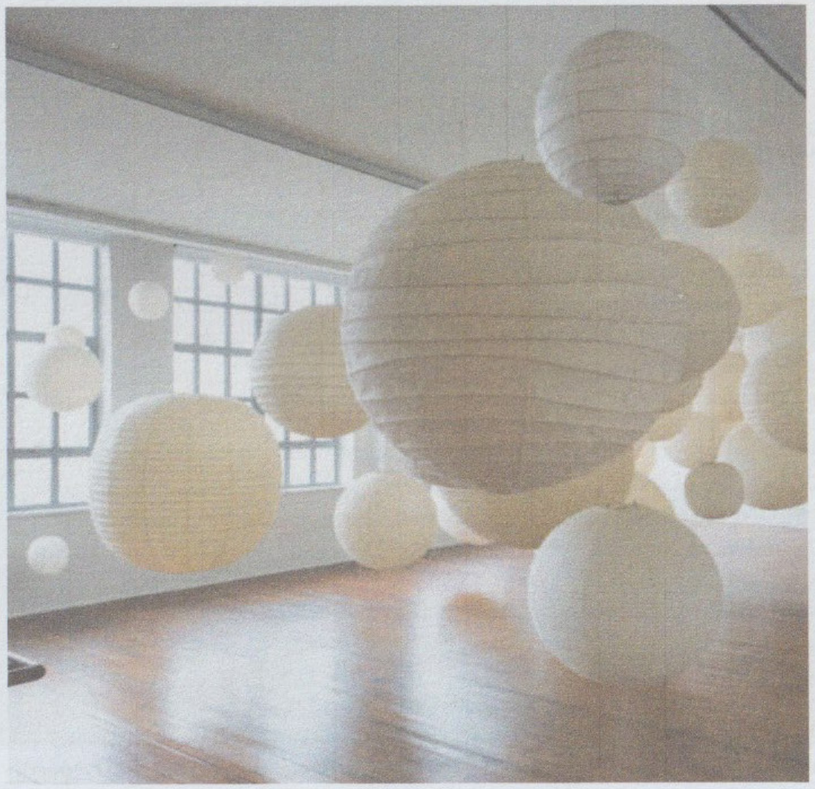
"Akari Light Sculpture,"
The Noguchi Museum.

In 1951 Isamu Noguchi visited the town of Gifu, Japan, known for its manufacture of lanterns and umbrellas from mulberry bark paper and bamboo. Noguchi designed the first of his lamps that would be produced by the traditional Gifu methods of construction. He called these works *Akari*, a term meaning light as illumination, but also implying the idea of weightlessness.

The fabrication of Akari in Japan at Ozeki & Co. since 1951 follows the traditional methods for Japanese Gifu lanterns. Each Akari is handcrafted beginning with the making of washi paper from the inner bark of the mulberry tree. Bamboo ribbing is stretched across sculptural molded wood forms. The washi paper is cut into strips and glued onto both sides of the framework. Once the glue has dried and the shape is set, the internal wooden form is disassembled and removed. The outcome is a resilient paper form, which can be collapsed and packed flat for shipping.

With the warm glow of light cast through handmade paper on a bamboo frame, Isamu Noguchi utilized traditional Japanese materials to bring modern design to the home. Like the beauty of falling leaves and the cherry blossom, Noguchi wrote, Akari are "poetic, ephemeral, and tentative." And he was fond of saying, "All that you require to start a home are a room, a tatami, and Akari."

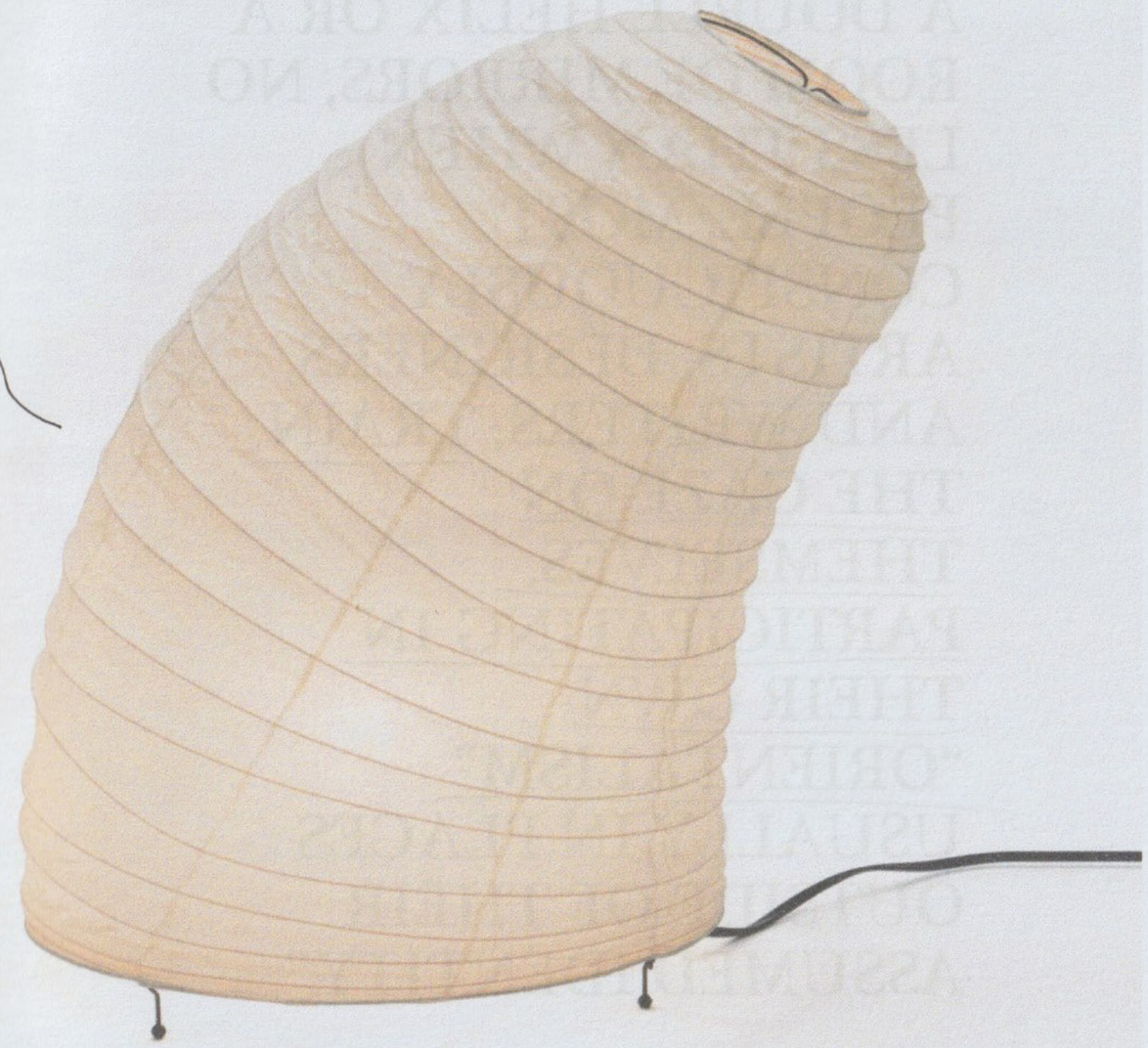
harken to Zen minimalism
marketing association
with "traditional Japaneseness"
beyond the craft itself —
tatami; part of lifestyle —
for a western market.



Photograph by Nicholas Knight for the Isamu Noguchi Foundation.

1978. Michio Noguchi, Worker at Ozeki Factory constructing Akari. The Isamu Noguchi archive.

Surreal quality that challenges the functional (form-as-function) boundaries of modernism



Isamu Noguchi, Akari VB-13T.
Image from the Noguchi Museum shop.

THE [TRANS-ORIENTALIST] GAZE IS A DOUBLE HELIX OR A ROOM OF MIRRORS, NO LESS THAN WHEN PEOPLE, MOST CONSPICUOUSLY ARTISTS, DESIGNERS, AND WRITERS, TRAIN THE GAZE ON THEMSELVES, PARTICIPATING IN THEIR OWN "ORIENTALISM" USUALLY IN PLACES OUTSIDE OF THEIR ASSUMED IDENTITY."

Geczy, A. (2019). Transori-entalism in Art, Fashion, and Film: Inventions of Identity.

heritage reclamation both feeds into/encourages nationalism but is Noguchi's was challenged by nationalism (because of his mixed background?)

Perhaps Noguchi's fantasy of claiming what he imagined was his "heritage" and "embracing the earth" could not be sustained in the face of the contemporary political reality of nationalism in Japan. In 1931 the Japanese government embarked on the Fifteen-Year War, which would finally lead to war between the nations of Noguchi's mother and father. To any erstwhile American or British friends who might have imagined war irrelevant to their friendship, Yone intoned,

> *What foolishness! The united Japanese millions will not accept such pious palaver.*
> *This is all-out, all-out:*
> *We'll show you how decisively we slaughter you, friendship and all!*[45]

This climate poisoned the Japanese earth Noguchi had been enamored of, and he returned to New York for the next two decades and pursued sculpture and design in materials such as metal, stone, wood, and plastic, but American clay rarely tempted him.

Bert Winther-Tamaki, "The Ceramic Art of Isamu Noguchi: A Close Embrace of the Earth," in *Isamu Noguchi and Modern Japanese Ceramics*, 2003. University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London.

Our discussion of tradition always encounters difficulty because of the contradictions between the East and the West that have plagued modern Japan. However, we cannot overcome the problem by a rash return to the past. In the early Meiji period, when Western painting techniques were introduced, nativist Nihonga *artists hastily turned to the past in their effort to preserve tradition. This did not lead to a true discovery of tradition, but resulted instead in an eclectic modernization that has continued to this day. Although this type of conflict between tradition and modernity is commonplace, nonetheless we should consider our time as a moment of great exchanges unprecedented in history. Certainly small compromises and reconciliations will continue to be made in restoring the past; still, they will not provide the path that guides Japanese art toward a genuinely Japanese tradition. We must not avert our eyes for a second from that huge entity of resistance that we call the world.*[2]

Takiguchi Shuzo, 1956,
avant-garde art critic.

Isamu Noguchi's Mother: Writer and Translator

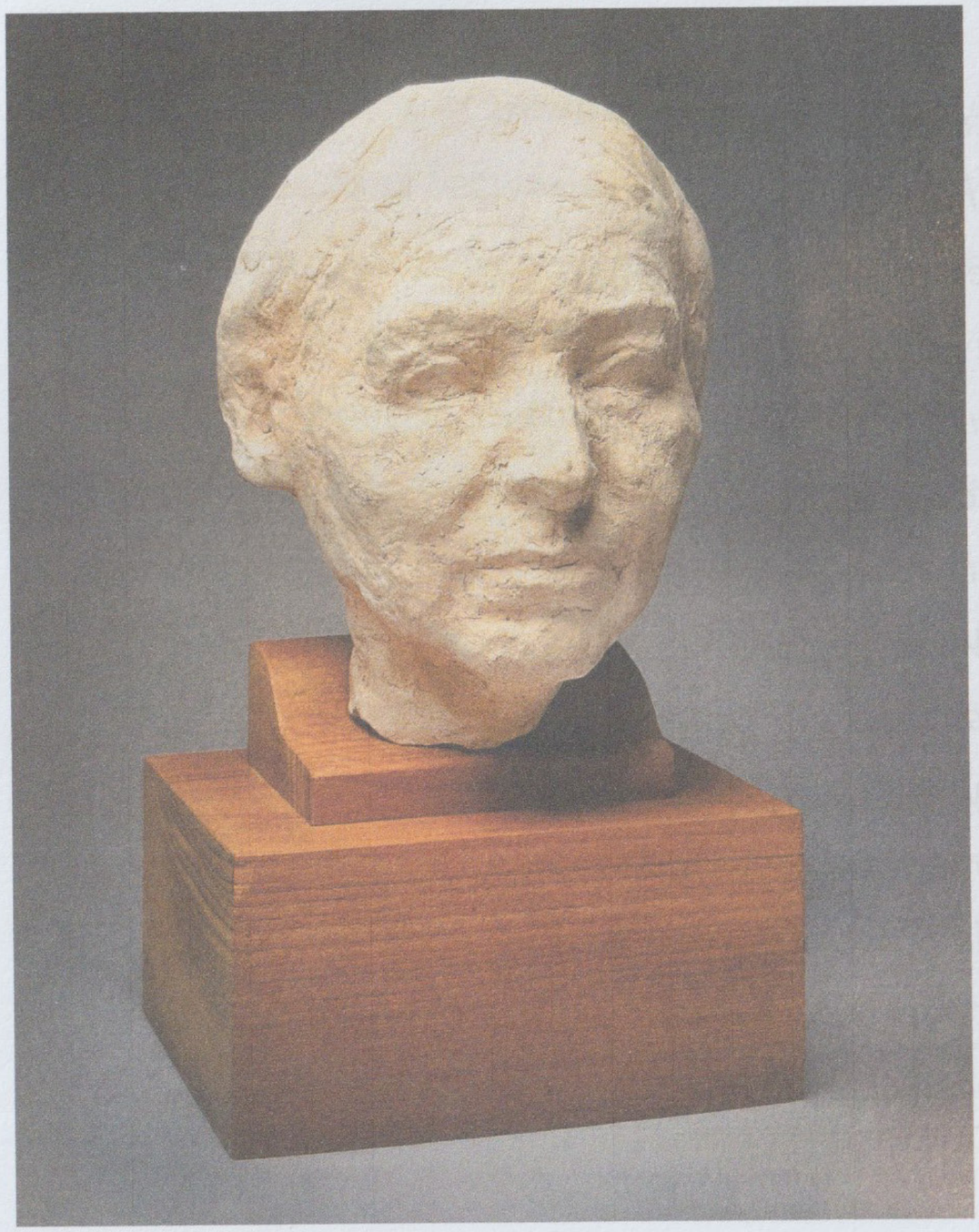
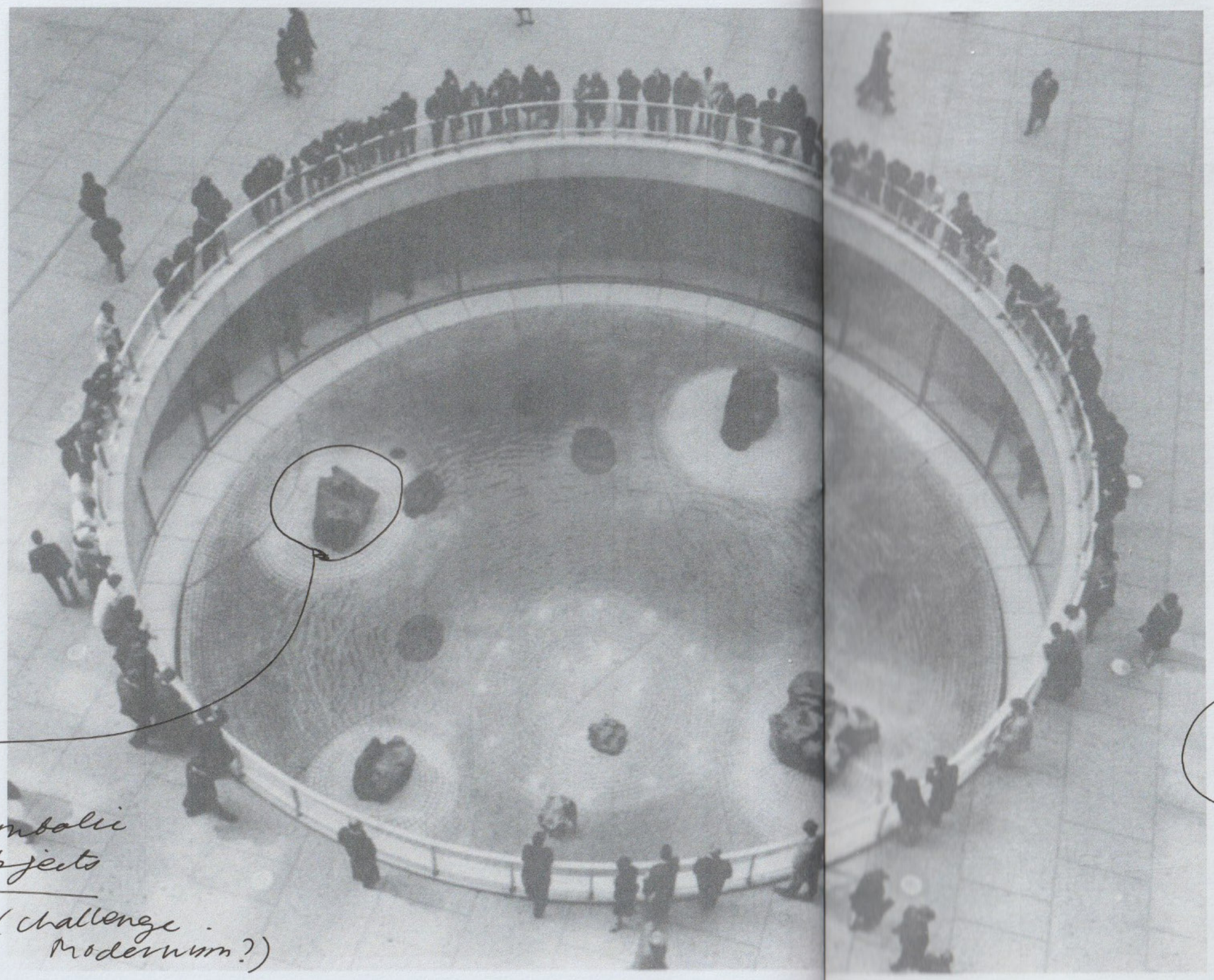


FIG. 1.3

Leonie Gilmour

by Isamu Noguchi (1904–1988). United States, 1932. Terra-cotta; wooden base, 35.5 x 18.5 x 15 cm (14 x 7 5/16 x 5 7/8 in.). Private collection.

American writer Leonie Gilmour (1873–1933) was Isamu Noguchi's mother. A graduate of Bryn Mawr College, she met the Japanese poet Yone Noguchi when she answered his advertisement for assistance in translating his poetry into English. Their son Isamu was born in 1904. The couple lived together in Japan only until 1908, but even after they separated Leonie remained in Japan, returning to the United States in 1920. Noguchi described his mother as "small and frail, with grey-blue eyes."* He modeled this portrait head in terra-cotta shortly after he returned from his first visit to Japan as an adult, and the year before Leonie unexpectedly died of pneumonia.



symbolic objects

(challenge Modernism?)

Bert Winther, "Review of *Isamu Noguchi* by Bruce Altshuler," 1995.

Boulders, one might think, could be obtained less expensively closer to the vicinity of their installation, but by importing them purposively from Japan they serve as talismans of Japanese cultural identity, as "authentic" as the Japanese earth itself. This displacement is most striking at the Chase Manhattan Bank fountain (*fig. 1*); a particularly unusual group of eroded river rocks was deposited like relics from Asia in a watery Rockefeller concourse in Wall Street.

But in the context of Noguchi's considerable personal presence as an increasingly well-known artist, the Japanese significatory potential of such motifs as garden rocks serves the function of enunciating the Asian alterity of Noguchi's Asian American identity. Rather than the seamless evocation of East and West that Lee admired in Noguchi, it is the problematics of disjuncture with the modernist tradition that is perhaps Noguchi's most interesting legacy.

self-orientalizing?

FIG. 1 Isamu Noguchi, Chase Manhattan Bank Plaza, New York, 1961–64. Courtesy Isamu Noguchi Foundation.

core modernist ideal of progress. Concerned that the artist was being reduced to a technical specialist by progressivist corporate modernism, he proposed Zen Buddhism as a remedy, for it seemed to offer "contacts with further depths of inner experience" as a means of fulfillment as "the complete artist." At this point in his career, Noguchi apparently felt that modernism was no longer a viable apparatus for his practice. He turned to premodern Japanese culture not simply as the primitivist Gauguin or Picasso turned to Tahiti and Africa, but in search of an alternative intellectual apparatus. But despite the stated aim of the "complete

Bert Winther, "Review of *Isamu Noguchi* by Bruce Altshuler," 1995.

mu =
key term in Zen Buddhism

1950-1951. Isamu Noguchi, *Mu.*

1963. Shinko Munakata. Ink drawing of "mu."

between - a third space

Text from the St. Louis Museum of Art.

The large central character on this sheet is mu or "nothingness," a key term in the philosophy of Zen Buddhism. This is understood as an alternative to dichotomies such as yes/no or positive/negative. As a practicing Buddhist, the Japanese printmaker Shiko Munakata often used religious subjects in his art. Munakata made this calligraphic work one day in 1963 after he had moved all of his belongings out of his studio and onto the street in Japan. Inspired by the emptiness of the space, he laid this sheet on the floor and boldly wrote the character with ink and brush.

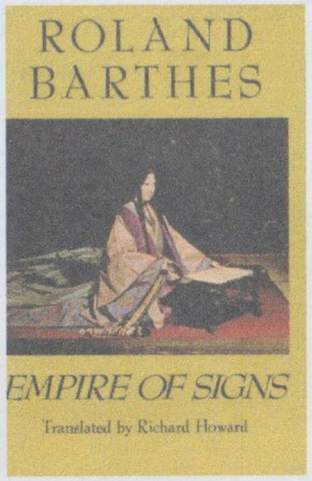
("room, tatami, akari")

Noguchi's integration of Zen Buddhism exists within a larger history:

> Centuries before they began to study Buddhist texts from India in the Sanskrit and Pali languages, Europeans encountered this "nothingness" in Japan. Indeed, Zen's *mu* played a central role in Europe's discovery of Buddhism and in the deeply connected invention of an "oriental philosophy" which I describe in this book.

Urs App, "The Cult of Emptiness: The Western Discovery of Buddhist Thought and the Invention of Oriental Philosophy." UniversityMedia, 2012.

imp. part of orientalist history



When Roland Barthes' *Empire of Signs* was published in 1970, and on its English translation in 1982, it was given a mixed reception. This may have been in part to do with Said's *Orientalism* having appeared four years earlier than the English version, and sensitivities to cultural appropriation being intense. It is easier to dismiss Barthes' book as another example of a white man's Orientalizing, thereby reducing its very premise to a rebuke. For Barthes' intention was to find in Japan an antidote to the West's penchant for endlessly accreting sign systems. In Japan, and particularly in Zen, Barthes sees a reprieve from the noise of Western culture, calling it a place of transition, hesitation, in which material things are placed in the service of effortlessness and weightlessness. "Japan," Barthes confesses, "has afforded him a situation of writing" which is an "emptiness" and "the exemption from all meaning."[2] In short, for Barthes, "Japan" begins as a set of signs whose very purpose is to precipitate a lapse of signification. "Japan," then, becomes a metonym for this process. What Barthes cannily located was the trait with Japanese culture for seeking out the space between. While there are a multitude of things that are incontestably Japanese, there is also an observable trait since the modernization of the Meiji Period at the end of the nineteenth century to bring the West into juxtaposition with itself. Arguably whatever may be deemed unquestionably "Japanese" is seen as such in contrast to what is not, and for the sake of describing an in-between space. Two examples bear

typical Orientalist gaze

mu

connection to Noguchi

Geczy, A. (2019). Transorientalism in Art, Fashion, and Film: Inventions of Identity. London: Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2019.

more on the history of "Zen" in the West:

Zen in the Art of Archery (Zen in der Kunst des Bogenschießens) is a book by German philosophy professor Eugen Herrigel, published in 1948, about his experiences studying Kyūdō, a form of Japanese archery, when he lived in Japan in the 1920s. It is credited with introducing Zen to Western audiences in the late 1940s and 1950s.

precursor to Barthes

Herrigel (1884–1955) was a German professor of philosophy, with a special interest in mysticism. From 1924 to 1929 he taught philosophy in Japan, and studied Kyūdō (the art of the Japanese bow) under a master named Awa Kenzō. Awa taught kyūdō in a way that was regarded by some as a mystical religion, called *Daishadokyo*. Daishadokyo was an approach to kyūdō that placed great emphasis on the spiritual aspect and differed from much of the mainstream practice at the time.[1] In 1936, Herrigel wrote a 20-page essay about his experiences, and then in 1948 expanded the essay into a short book. The book was translated into English in 1953 and Japanese in 1955.

Both Arthur Koestler and Gershom Scholem accused Herrigel's book of being influenced by and justifying the politics of the Nazi party on the pages of Encounter magazine.[2][3] Scholem also accuses Herrigel's widow of editing his writing and hiding the fact that he was an active member of the Nazi party and the Nazi organization the Militant League for German Culture.

Others, such as Shoji Yamada in his book *Shots in the Dark*, claims that many of the conversations between Herrigel and Awa Kenzo were altered or completely fabricated by the author. !

→ heritage + daft discourse in nationalist / fascist movements

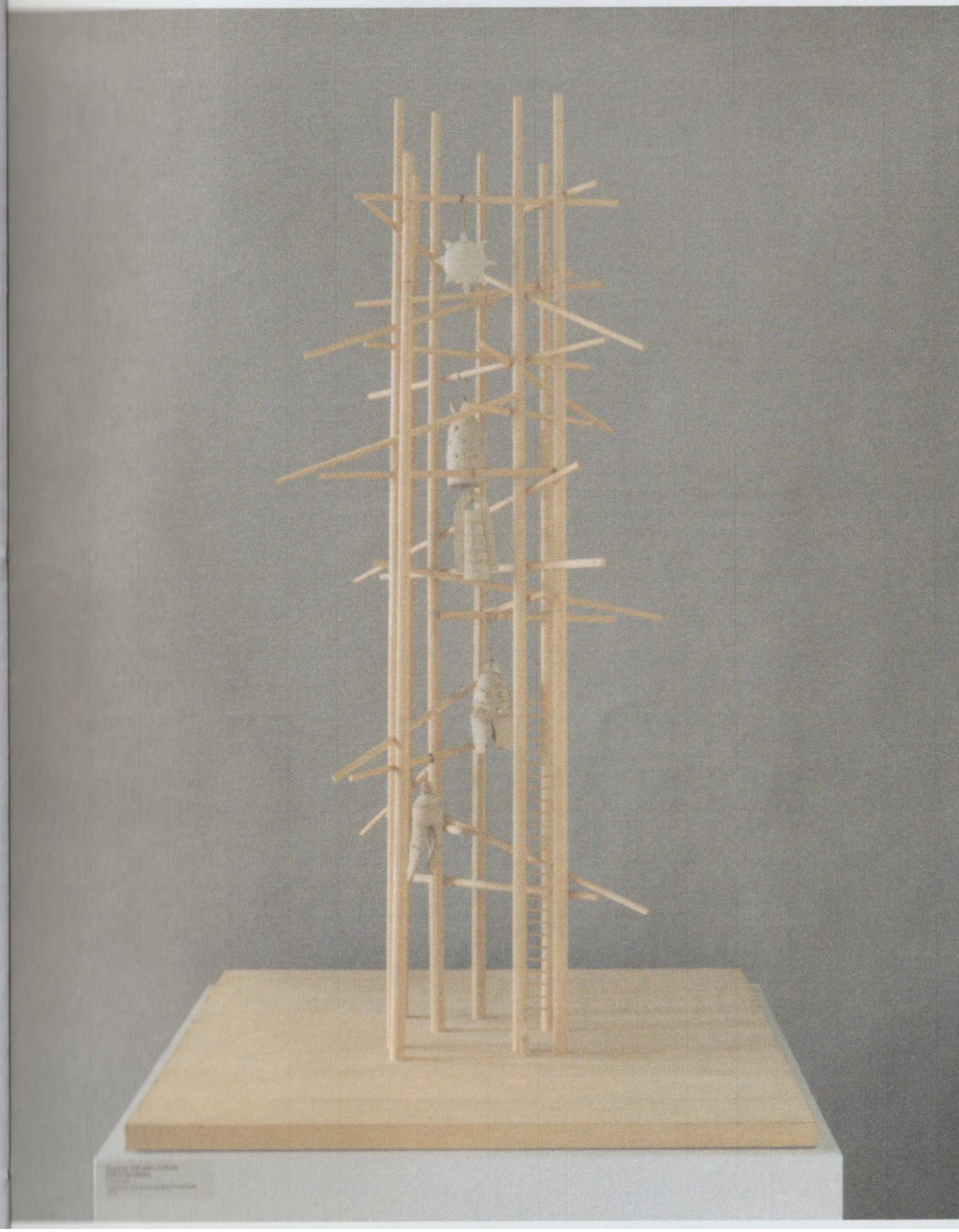
Delicacy
in
junctures

Creation
of
in-between
space

Sitting
between
Japan and
the US...

transcultural?

Isamu Noguchi, *Bell Tower for Hiroshima*, 1950 (partially reconstructed 1986). Terracotta, wood.



Said shortly before his passing:

Cit. Tony Judt, "Edward Said: The Rootless Cosmopolitan," in Reappraisals: Reflections on the Forgotten Twentieth Century, New York: Penguin Press, 2008, 166.

I STILL HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IT MEANS TO HAVE A COUNTRY.